

# Gulf of Mexico Division

## Restoration and Preservation Approaches

### ISSUE SUMMARY:

The Gulf of Mexico Division (Division or GMD), established in 1988, develops and identifies novel approaches critical to long-term restoration and preservation of the Gulf of Mexico and its watershed.

The Division responds to emerging environmental and public health concerns as well as continues work around existing efforts with proven impact on Gulf conservation and resilience including supporting the Administrator on the RESTORE Council and providing support to the Office of Water on NRDA efforts.

### UPCOMING MILESTONES:

2021 Key Milestones are:

- February 2021 – RESTORE Council submits Annual Report to Congress
- April 2021 – RESTORE Council vote to approve Funded Priority List (FPL 3b) to member projects
- Spring/Summer 2021 – RESTORE Chair approval of State Expenditure Plan (SEP) amendments

### BACKGROUND:

#### **Gulf of Mexico Program Investment**

The Division's work is guided by four strategic principles: improved water quality, restored habitats, advanced community resilience and increased environmental education. Funding for projects that support these principles are awarded annually through a competitive Request for Applications with strong emphasis on leveraging partnerships, expertise and innovative technologies.

The chart below lists the Division's fiscal investment in projects by state (including Gulf states as well as those states in the upper part of the watershed).

State	Fiscal Investment
Alabama	\$4,126,308
Arkansas	\$1,150,000
Florida	\$4,116,768
Georgia	\$300,000
Iowa	\$4,921,764
Louisiana	\$6,133,843
Maryland	\$1,000,000
Mississippi	\$7,363,023
Oklahoma	\$29,947
Tennessee	\$930,064
Texas	\$3,353,506
Virginia	\$1,999,594

To promote and sustain water quality in the Gulf of Mexico and contributing waterways, the Gulf of Mexico releases Request for Applications, Notable Federal Funding Opportunities further expounded on are: Farmer to Farmer and Trash Free Waters. The Farmer to Farmer RFA encourages use of innovative tools or methods and heightens awareness of novel pedagogical approaches. The Trash Free Waters RFA allows for demonstrations, investigations, training, or education around reducing and elimination trash from Gulf of Mexico waterways. Farmer to Farmer and Trash Free Waters projects will have a lasting impact on the quality of the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem producing plentiful marine life and habitats thereby assuring a sustained livelihood for commercial fishers and shrimpers. To date, GMD has invested \$9, 538,552 and \$8,121,057 in Farmer to Farmer and Trash Free Waters, respectively.

#### **RESTORE**

Under the 2012 Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities and Revived Economies of the Gulf Coast States Act (RESTORE Act), Congress established the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council (the Council) and the Gulf Coast Restoration Trust Fund (Trust Fund). Eighty percent of the *Deepwater Horizon* related CWA civil penalties are dedicated to the Trust Fund for

environmental restoration, economic recovery projects, and tourism and seafood promotion in the five Gulf states. The Council membership includes the Governors of the five Gulf States, and the Secretaries of the U.S. Departments of Agriculture, Army, Commerce, Homeland Security and the Interior, and the Administrator for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The Administrator of the EPA serves as the Chair of the Council. The Administrator designated the Deputy Administrator to serve as Chair of the Council, and also designated the Deputy Administrator and the RESTORE Program Manager to serve on the Council Steering Committee.

The Council administers 60 percent of the funds made available from the Trust Fund which is comprised of the Comprehensive Plan Component (30%), under which the Council selects from projects proposed by the member states and agencies, and the Spill Impact Component (30%), under which the states receive varying amounts based on a statutory formula.

GMD provides key leadership to the RESTORE Council's Steering Committee, coordinates engagement of EPA resources (GMD, R4, R6, OW, OGC) on numerous workgroups, and is implementing the following Council-assigned projects/programs: (1) *Gulf of Mexico Conservation Enhancement Grant Program*; (2) *Mobile Bay National Estuary Program*; (3) *Tampa Bay Estuary Program*; (4) *Gulf of Mexico Estuary Program* (NW Florida).

### **Deepwater Horizon Natural Resources Damage Assessment (NRDA)**

This year (April 20, 2020) marked the 10-year anniversary of the Deepwater Horizon (DWH) Oil Spill that killed 11 people and prompted the largest Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) ever undertaken. Many remembrances occurred this year to commemorate this tragic event. To acknowledge the work that has since been completed to restore Gulf natural resources, messages of hope were shared to highlight the over 200 Gulf restoration projects that have come to fruition in the past 10 years. GMD staff were honored to participate in the EPA 10-Year video "Restoring Gulf Natural Resources" featured on <https://www.epa.gov/deepwaterhorizon>

As a member of the DWH NRDA Trustee Council, EPA is a part of seven Trustee Implementation Groups (TIGs). GMD staff members serve as primary and alternate EPA Trustee representatives on the TIGs for Alabama, Florida, Mississippi and Region-wide. Supporting the Office of Water lead for NRDA, GMD staff members also provide technical expertise for all five Gulf states in the areas of monitoring and adaptive management, and the injured species related to oysters and sturgeon. As a result of the NRDA restoration efforts, measurable results-oriented projects are being implemented that directly benefit the Gulf ecosystem and the natural resources injured by the DWH oil spill through: restoring and conserving habitat, providing and enhancing recreational use, restoring water quality, and replenishing and protecting injured species. GMD staff also continue to provide technical expertise for the Agency. GMD staff efforts help the Office of Water ensure that the up to \$8.8 billion settlement for restoration to address natural resources injuries and lost recreational uses restores important Gulf ecosystem.

Examples of specific DWH NRDA work being supported by GMD staff:

--The Alabama TIG finalized their third restoration plan that includes five recreational use projects and two bird projects at a total cost of \$23.5 million. GMD staff is the alternate TIG representative supporting EPA Region 4.

-- The Florida TIG continues its work on its Restoration Plan II/Environmental Assessment that will include projects for the bird, sea turtle, marine mammals, habitat on federally managed lands, and recreational use restoration types

--The Louisiana TIG in January 2020 approved \$507,237 in Monitoring and Adaptive Management (MAM) funding to facilitate the development of a programmatic MAM strategy for the Louisiana Restoration Area.  
(<https://www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov/2020/01/louisiana-approves-funding-programmatic-monitoring-and-adaptive-management-strategy>)

--The Mississippi TIG published its Restoration Plan II and Environmental Assessment, which includes four projects in the wetlands, coastal and nearshore habitats and oysters restoration types valued at approximately \$15.4 million. GMD staff continued water quality field monitoring for the Upper Pascagoula River nutrient reduction project.

--The Texas TIG is working on oyster engineering designs for possible restoration in Galveston Bay.

--The Regionwide TIG is drafting its first Restoration Plan and Environmental Assessment, which will include projects in the birds, sea turtles, and marine mammals restoration types.

--The Open Ocean TIG released an updated Open Ocean Monitoring and Adaptive Management Strategy. The strategy includes the Trustees' initial priorities for information needed to help evaluate the outcomes of restoration, assess progress towards restoration goals, and inform restoration planning and implementation.

## Gulf of Mexico Division

### Restoration and Preservation Approaches

#### KEY EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS:

☐ Congress      ☐ Industry      ☒ States      ☐ Tribes      ☒ Media      ☐ Other Federal  
Agency      ☐ NGO      ☒ Local Governments      ☐ Other (name of stakeholder)

#### MOVING FORWARD:

LEAD OFFICE/REGION: REGION 4

OTHER KEY OFFICES/REGIONS: GMD